MUTINY!

A MILITANT MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM AN ANARCHIST-COMMUNIST PERSPECTIVE

MARCH 21

Thousands March in Community-Run Mardi Gras

Pride in Protest's community-run and political Mardi Gras to kill religious discrimination bill, decriminialise sex work, and call for the end of Black deaths in custody saw thousands march down Oxford street.

With pride flags waving in the wind, chants for First Nation's sovereignty, abolition of the police, and for queer liberation, and dancing down the street, Pride in Protest's community-run Mardi Gras was a true festival of protest.

In the week leading up to the protest, police mounted immense pressure to try to stop the protest by dragging organisers to the supreme court on blatently disingenuous public health grounds. Pride in Protest argued that protest was a right we would not cede. In any case there has been no transmission at protests and that COVID safety measures were being adopted; protest was being unfairly restricted whilst activities that made the capitalists money run freely. It was a last minute intervention by the health department, won through political pressure driven by the alliances Pride in Protest had built, that threw the case out, and the determination of militants on the day to take Taylor Square despite police resistance that ensured an open march down Oxford Street.

This march was significant not only for making a serious advance on the right to protest by marching despite police resistance, but primarily for polarising the queer community along sorely necessary political grounds beyond the confines of Pride in Protest itself after the slump post-marriage equality.

The demands do include fighting against the conservative right's counter-attack from marriage equality in the form of Morrison's religious discrimination bill and Latham's Trans Education bill, which both serve to discipline queer workers and lock them from sections of the labour market.

Beyond this however, Pride in Protest wove one of its core theses through this protest - that racism is a queer issue; that none of us are free until we are all free. That is not only because members of our community face both racism in homophic and transphobic forms, but also that we cannot smash homophobia, transphobia, or racism without uniting together against the capitalist system. By highlighting these connections Pride in Protest is doing practical solidarity building between Black Lives Matter, refugee, and queer liberation movements, espescally through its critisism of the role of police in enforcing racism and homophobia to the benefit of the ruling class.

The rally also called for the decriminalisation of sex work. The call for decriminalisation instead of legalisation is because both legalisation and criminalisation makes bosses out of the police for sex workers, and decriminalisation gives autonomy to the sex workers themselves. As sex work is work, then we should be arguing for the self-managmenet of workers through industrial unionism, rather than policing, to keep them safe, in the same way that more bosses does not make a workplace safer, but workers managing their own safety.

Both of these demands tie back into the abolition of the police and prisons, which only serve to oppress working people, and which must be dismantled through reforms, won from below, driven by protests such as these.

*Pride in Protest has called a further protest for **Trans Day of Visibility on Saturday 27th March at 2pm**, The Hub Newtown, further calling for the right to birth certificate self-ID. March and fight for queer liberation!*

MUTINY! SYDNEY

Against Austerity, Against Uni Fee Hikes

With austerity measures ramping up across the country, how do we fight back against the government's massive attacks on workers and students?

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare major contradictions within Australian capitalism; whilst the last budget saw worker's rights attacks, cuts to social welfare, and funding to public sector workers dwindle, the rich have meanwhile taken every opportunity possible to profit from the crisis. These austerity measures are a part of a long term strategy to push the burdens of this crisis onto the working class while the ruling class that oppresses them, including university Vice-Chancellors, the state and capitalists, shore up their dominance in society.

Not only is the government pursuing cuts to welfare and the public sector, but they are attempting to implement industrial relations reform which aims to scrap the 'better off overall test' which will give bosses more power to reduce wages and increase job insecurity. The growing confidence of the political class is already having tangible effects. Workers on the Sydney railways are currently being pressured to accept a pay cut deal, and companies such as Coles were confident enough to lock out Smeaton Grange distribution workers for 14 weeks without pay for demanding a fair redundancy package, facing pressure from union bureaucracy as well as from bosses to surrender.

The Liberal government's current political strategy is analogous to the union accords sought by the Labor party in the 1980s, albeit with the advantage of an extremely weakened union movement. They are aiming to resolve the political and economic crisis stemming from COVID-19 by delivering mild concessions on state welfare programs, whilst on the other hand using attacks on workers rights to pay for it. Worse, the government is using this money to prop up the fossil fuel industry through ScoMo's 'gas-led recovery', destroying and accumulating Indigenous land for dangerous gas extraction. Their plan will inevitably be to further cut back on social welfare down the line, thus solidifying the economic power of the ruling class, accelerating the climate crisis and strengthening Australian capitalism.

Whilst capital and the state collude to profit from the pandemic, active repression of any dissent is rampant, whether it be through the police to smash protest or the discipline of union activists. Even though there has not been a single transmission of COVID-19 from a protest in Australia, and restrictions are being wound back, state governments have continued to retain lockdown limits on protests. The Mardi Gras protest march on the 6th of March faced active police sabotage, supposedly in the name of "public health", but realistically because of its demands for Black Lives Matter, its resistance to Liberal party politics, and its demand for the abolition of police and prisons. Likewise, many key unionists have been targeted for sackings in the university sector to facilitate the restructuring process.

University fee hikes and budget cuts are an obvious example of how the state is overtly implementing austerity measures to prop up and empower the ruling classes and their institutions. Vice Chancellors are the appointed bosses of the university and will inevitably fall behind its broad agenda - the Liberal governments' austerity measures have opened

the door for them to further neoliberalise the Australian university system through attacks on students and staff. The attack on staff has most clearly resulted in 17,000 job losses throughout the sector since the start of COVID-19, including 500 staff sackings at UNSW alone. For students, most fees have been substantially hiked; arts degrees have doubled in cost while the quality of education has taken a dive as classes have been moved online and increasingly less teaching and support is available. These measures were implemented in the name of 'saving the university' from financial crisis, however this is clearly false as many institutions including USYD actually turned a profit the past financial year.

The university is used by the ruling classes to reproduce and maintain capitalism, not merely by training a section of students to be effective members of the ruling class, but also by producing high paid technical workers and managers, dividing the working class by locking out sections from this education through fees and other methods. Most staff are significantly underpaid, and students are forced to pay increasingly exorbitant fees for industry-ready degrees which plunge them into debt for decades, just so they can enter the workforce and generate profits for another boss. It is in the interests of the ruling classes to ensure universities continue to function according to this corporate model.

This poses the important question of what to do in the here and now. This year universities across the ACT and NSW will renegotiate their Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) which due to Australia's anti-democratic strike laws, are the only period where workers can legally take industrial action. But it would be a mistake to simply wait for the upcoming bargaining period to mobilise; the groundwork must be laid beforehand by building popular support for fighting back within the staff and student body. We must start organising now to build confidence in staff and students to fight these attacks in order to lay the foundation for any future strike action, and to develop infrastructure needed in student spaces to demonstrate to staff that students support them. This means organising people around issues that affect them; the faculty contingents during last year's campaign against the cuts at USYD were extremely successful at mobilising students around key issues that concretely impacted their own education. This specificity allowed the demands and spirit of protest to

spread beyond the organised student left.

This kind of approach is necessary to develop the militancy to challenge the NTEU bureaucracy when they inevitably try to suppress increasingly radical political demands and more militant strike action. If done correctly, the phase leading up to the EBA bargaining period will be a vital opportunity to make arguments to staff and students about flaws in the capitalist system and university sector, further politicise campuses, and broaden the struggle to demand democratic control over universities by staff and students and free fully-funded education. Students and staff are the ones who make universities run and create value for society, so they should be the ones running their own universities. When latent contradictions within the university develop themselves into outright antagonisms, all efforts must be made for students to mobilise and stand in solidarity with any industrial action that rank and file staff in the NTEU do take - withdrawing our labour is the greatest weapon we have as workers against the capitalist enemy, whether they be a boss or a Vice-Chancellor.

Regardless of the outcome this year, we must aim to build student and staff militancy to endure into the future, which is why long term demands like free education and democratic self-management of workers over their university are vital for a sustained fight back. The cuts to university funding are simply another assault on ordinary people by the government and capitalist class, who are attempting to profit from the crisis and shore up their political and economic supremacy. Money is being funneled away from public programs, and the ruling classes aided by the state are utilising the various tools available to them to suppress any dissent to their gradual erosion of workers rights, public services and state welfare programs. It is only through persistent argument and example in sites of struggle such as the university that we can hope to fight back.

Abolish Cashless Welfare!

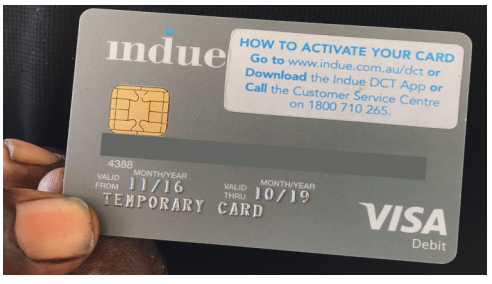
Whilst governments give handouts to big business they are set to cut the welfare rate and increase control of the unemployed, most notoriously through the planned cashless welfare card.

Cuts to welfare at the current stage of the pandemic economy is not only affecting how much support the unemployed are receiving, but increasing the forms of coercive control the state is implementing on the unemployed class. Most notably, the trial of the Indue Cashless Debit Card (CDC), a debit card that controls 80% of welfare payments in the name of preventing alcohol use and gambling, was extended for another two years last December. This trial was tested in areas with significant First Nation populations, whom the government feels confident to exploit, with the goal of expanding to the entire unemployed and underemployed class.

Touted as a useful tool to add into the mix of welfare services, the card's effectiveness has been questioned since its inception. Earlier this month a study by the University of Adelaide was released showing mixed results of the card's effectiveness at reducing social harm. The supposed benefits of the card such as reducing alcohol and illicit drug consumption were found not to be attributable to the CDC alone with regards to alcohol, and no definitive conclusions could be drawn with regards to illicit drug use. Unsurprisingly and fairly those on the trial felt that the CDC was discriminatory, embarrassing and unfair. Not only is the CDC not successful at what it purports to do, but it's difficult to get off once you are on it as you have to demonstrate "sound financial management".

The lack of evidence of the efficacy of this type of system is hardly a surprise: a similar system called the BasicsCard was previously trialed in the Northern Territory (which has the largest percentage of First Nations people in the country) to the same mixed results. If the government knows something doesn't work, why do these attempts to implement it persist?

If you look at the bigger picture - robo-debt, the re-introduction of mutual obligations, the attacks on public housing and proposed drug testing for those on Job Seeker and Youth Allowance - you find a system that's constructed to enhance the scope of the government's surveillance and stigmatisation of the poor, underemployed, and disabled. The government continues to treat those who need our help in a punitive authoritarian way whilst forcing feelings of shame and unfairness onto them. It's in the state's best interest to vilify those who are out of work, unable to work, or have insecure work.



The system creates antagonism between people on welfare and employed workers, fostering a sense of powerlessness on people who rely on welfare. A situation the ruling class benefits from immensely, as it increases the desperation of an unemployed class of workers to undercut wages as a whole, work jobs under the minimum wage, and scab on striking workers. The ineffectiveness and viciousness of welfare is precisely the point. This is on top of the social damage punitive welfare measures put in place, especially for those trying to leave family and domestic violence situations.

We should also see the CDC as just another attempt to effectively further the privatisation of the welfare system by adding an extra corporate layer that funnels vast sums of taxpayer money into Indue Ltd and to divide workers.

> *If the rich can afford handouts to companies like Indue, it can afford to raise the rate for the unemployed.*

If unemployed and employed workers are divided, the state and the bosses win. They win by dividing us as a united working class and using this division to drop the wages of waged workers, and needlessly punish unemployed workers. The "lazy dole bludgers" myth which is often trotted out to justify welfare control is a fiction designed to cast other workers as the enemy, rather than the bosses and the government who are the real culprits in cutting welfare and wages at every opportunity.

As a united class we need to not only raise the rate of welfare payments, but also demand the end of all means testing for welfare. This is the only way to smash the punitive system of welfare control that affects a massive section of the unemployed and underemployed class. If the rich can afford handouts to companies like Indue, it can afford to raise the rate for the unemployed. To win, we are going to have to unite together to demand it.

MUTINY! SYDNEY

School Students Leading the Fight Against Rape

With the political class closing ranks around Christian Porter, outed as a sexual abuser, students are driving the pressure from below to smash sexism and the system.

On the evening of the 12th of March, approximately one hundred people – mostly young women – gathered at Sydney Town Hall. They were there to hear a number of speakers relate their own personal experiences with sexual assault, and to attack the government's disgraceful complicity in rape – the protection of Attorney-General Christian Porter from any form of investigation into the allegations that he raped a minor, and the harassment of Brittany Higgins, the parliamentary staffer assaulted by one of her colleagues.

Rape has long been a weapon of the Australian privileged classes against the oppressed. Sexual violence was and is integral to the colonial brutality enacted on indigenous people. A speaker relayed a story by an indigenous woman about how custodians running "care" facilities used rape as a way of disciplining unruly children. Similarly, sexual violence is a common tool of discipline and oppression in the Australian prison system, enacted both by guards and other inmates.

The rally ended with a march to the Liberal Party headquarters on William St. The government's attacks on women stretch beyond the Higgins and Porter cases, as the speakers noted; this is the same government that is committed to slashing social welfare, preventing women from securing the economic independence and the support networks necessary to leave abusive relationships. Porter himself in his tenure as Social Services minister spearheaded a number of these cuts, including the privatisation of the sexual assault hotline, 1800RESPECT.

The rally was driven by the positive, growing movement of young women in school demanding that schools introduce serious education around consent. At present, such education is half-arsed at best, harmful at worst, but mainly just non-existent; this is particularly the case in private, religious schools.

Schools have a duty of care to their students, but in reality their duty primarily extends to moulding students to best fit their future class positions. It is telling that schools only really began dealing with sexual assault at all when they were forced to by civil suits and new legislation – legislation which itself was forced into existence as a concession to popular pressure.

Such legislation is far from perfect. One speaker related how a law that was designed with the intention of protecting her – mandatory reporting – was used to disempower her. Early in her teens, she was sexually assaulted. A few years later, the mental distress she experienced as a result was such that it was interfering with her progress at school; she felt it necessary to disclose this to a school counsellor. The counsellor, bound by mandatory reporting guidelines, filed reports with the police and with the school. She could not even own her experience of being assaulted – it was taken from her, into the hands of the cops and the courts.

This is not to say that things would have been better if the mandatory reporting laws did not exist, or that we should demand their immediate repeal. The point is that in a patriarchal society, where men possess the systematic power to control women's lives, there is no law that will truly end sexual assault, or give full recourse to victims. They will never provide us with the weapons to destroy their own authority. Christian Porter and his defenders chastise "mob justice" and ask for the rule of law to be respected, but can the "mob" be blamed for being cynical, when we can see the victims of the rule of law with our own eyes?

Just like capitalists introduce limited reforms to dissipate workers' anger in order to better preserve their own system, so too do politicians with the limited reforms introduced to deal with gender oppression. The progress in society towards greater equality has not come from the generosity of the people in charge. It has come through rebels like those in front of Town Hall forcing change. It's that same force that has the potential to go further than any movement has in the past, to abolish the systems that beat us down, so that we can all be free. By coming together, we break the fear the rapists, the capitalists and the politicians force on us.

Black Flag Sydney

Mutiny is published by Black Flag Sydney, an anarcho-communist organisation in Sydney. We aim to build the power of working class movements against capitalism, and to provide an analysis of capitalism and the state that grows the force of revolutionary anarchist ideas in Sydney, with the goal of stateless communism. We acknowledge that we operate on is unceded Aboriginal land, and that the struggle for First Nation's sovereignty is the struggle for the liberation of the entire working class.

BLACK FLAG SYDNEY

Upcoming Events

Our sister group, Sydney Anarcho-Communists, runs an open fortnightly reading group on Wednesday's at 6pm, at 6 Gerald St Marrickville - for all those interested in discussing and learning about anarchist and communist ideas.

For any enquiries about this newsletter, please email contact@blackflagsydney.com

Sydney Anarcho-Communists

sydneyancoms@gmail.com

SYDNEY ANARCHO-COMMUNISTS

24th March	Anarchism and Education
7th April	TBA
21st April	TBA